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Subject: American Elm in DC

To: Gerard D. Hertel, Assistant Director
Forest Health and Management

The intent of this letter is to advise you of the current and impending crisis related to American Elm in the District of Columbia. On September 30, Brad Onken and Al Iskra visited with Sandra Hill, Chief of the DC Tree Maintenance Division and Jim Sherald, Plant Pathologist for the NPS-National Capitol Region, to discuss a prevention/suppression project related to Dutch Elm Disease (DED).

The Park Service has a monitoring and DED prevention/suppression program for the 2400 elms they are responsible for. Until recently, this program has successfully maintained a DED mortality rate at less than 1% per year. To some degree, the NPS efforts have been circumvented by declining budgets and the loss of personnel to the National Biological Service. The primary problem however, is the District's backlog of infected elms that remain a source of inoculum.

Since about 1994, budget cuts for the DC Tree Division have lowered the priority of the DED program. Consequently the sanitation work, that is so critical to a successful program, has fallen by the wayside. At present, it is estimated that there are over 700 diseased and beetle infested elms lining the District's streets. This amount of infection source is a biological crisis severely impacting and negating any effort the Park Service makes to control the situation on lands it manages. The rate of infection in the Monumental Core area (the most sensitive area managed by the NPS) is now at over 2% and a significant increase is anticipated unless efforts to eliminate sources of inoculum are undertaken.

Our discussions have resulted in plans to submit a prevention/suppression request for the District of Columbia which would encompass:

1. The removal of 700 plus diseased and/or beetle infested trees to remove inoculum sources and beetle vectors;
2. implementation of a survey plan to effectively identify newly infected elm trees so they can be dealt with immediately; and
3. transferring GypsES technology to enhance the District's capability of tracking and prioritizing tree service and maintenance work.

These three efforts will be in conjunction with the development of preventative maintenance program for American Elm within the District that is complimentary to that of the Park Service and in line with recommendations of the Save-The-Elms Task Force. Furthermore, the development of a replanting program will also be considered.

Our discussions with Sandra Hill have indicated that the District can commit approximately \$170,000 to the prevention/suppression effort. Preliminary estimates range in the neighborhood of \$670,000 for total project costs including a field survey crew.

The proposed project has two important aspects:

1) the biological necessity of removing the source of inoculum and breeding sites of the insect vectors as quickly as possible. The Park Service sees a certain amount of urgency to this as it directly affects the success of their efforts, and

2) the logistical constraints of getting suppression funds to the District in a timely manner so that contracts can be let to perform the work. For this aspect it may be necessary to view this effort more in a two-year timeframe though this has definite biological drawbacks.

Listed below are several questions that the District has asked us to address:

- Is an EA going to be required to remove dead or dying elm trees if the Forest Service provides funding?
- What would be the expected cost share ratio from the District?
- How soon could a fund decision be made and made available (stressing the importance of removing as many infected elms as possible prior to April beetle emergence)?

/s/ Dan

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